

Common Responses to Trauma & Coping Strategies

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Physical Reactions:

- Aches and pains like headaches, backaches and stomach aches
- Sudden sweating and/or heart palpitations
- Changes in sleep patterns, appetite, interest in sex
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Easily startled by noises or unexpected touch
- More susceptible to colds and illnesses
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs and/or overeating

Emotional Reactions:

- Shock and disbelief
- Fear and/or anxiety
- Grief, disorientation, denial
- Hyper-alertness or hypervigilance
- Irritability, restlessness, outbursts or anger or rage
- Emotional swings—like crying and then laughing
- Worrying or ruminating—intrusive thoughts of the trauma
- Nightmares
- Flashbacks—feeling like the trauma is happening now
- Feelings of helplessness, panic, feeling out of control
- Increased need to control everyday experiences
- Minimizing the experience
- Attempts to avoid anything associated with the trauma
- Tendency to isolate oneself
- Feelings of detachment
- Concern over burdening others with problems
- Emotional numbing or restricted range of feelings
- Difficulty trusting and/or feelings of betrayal
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering
- Feelings of self-blame or survivor's guilt
- Shame
- Diminished interest in everyday activities or depression
- Unpleasant past memories resurfacing
- Loss of a sense of order or fairness in the world
- Expectation of doom and fear of the future

Helpful Coping Strategies:

- Mobilize a support system and reach out—connect with others, especially those who may have shared the stressful event
- Talk about the traumatic event with empathic listeners
- Cry
- Hard exercise like jogging, aerobics, bicycling, walking
- Relaxation exercise like yoga, stretching, massage
- Humor
- Prayer and/or meditation; listening to relaxing guided imagery; progressive deep muscle relaxation
- Hot baths
- Music and art
- Maintain balanced diet and sleep cycle as much as possible
- Avoid over-using stimulants like caffeine, sugar or nicotine
- Commitment to something personally meaningful and important each day
- Hug those you love, pets included
- Eat warm turkey, boiled onions, baked potatoes, cream-based soups as these are tryptophane activators, which help you feel tired but good (like after Thanksgiving dinner)
- Proactive responses toward personal and community safety—organize or do something socially active
- Write about your experience in detail—just for yourself or to share with others

People are usually surprised that reactions to trauma can last longer than they expected. It may take weeks, months and in some cases, many years to fully regain equilibrium. Many people will get through this period with the help and support of family and friends. However, sometimes family and friends may push people to “get over it” before they are ready. Let them know that such responses are not helpful for you right now, though you appreciate they are trying to help. Many people find that individual, group or family counseling are helpful, and in particular, EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) is a phenomenally rapid and wonderful therapeutic method. Either way, the key word is CONNECTION—ask for help, support, understanding and opportunities to talk.

The Chinese character for crisis is a combination of two words—danger and opportunity. People who fully engage in recovery from trauma discover unexpected benefits. As they gradually heal their wounds, survivors find that they are also developing inner strength, compassion for others, increasing self-awareness, and often the most surprising—a greater ability to experience joy and serenity than even before.

COMPASSION FATIGUE SELF-TEST FOR HELPERS

Consider each of the following characteristics about you and your current situation. Write in the number for the best response. Answer all questions. Use one of the following answers:

1= Rarely/Never 2= At times 3= Not Sure 4= Often 5= Very Often

Items about you:

1. _____ I force myself to avoid certain thoughts or feelings that remind me of a frightening experience.
2. _____ I find myself avoiding certain activities or situations because they remind me of a frightening experience.
3. _____ I have gaps in my memory about frightening events.
4. _____ I feel estranged from others.
5. _____ I have difficulty falling or staying asleep.
6. _____ I have outbursts of anger or irritability with little provocation.
7. _____ I startle easily.
8. _____ While working with a victim, I thought about violence against the person or persons who victimized.
9. _____ I am a sensitive person.
10. _____ I have had flashbacks connected to my clients and families.
11. _____ I have had first-hand experience with traumatic events in my adult life.
12. _____ I have had first-hand experience with traumatic events in my childhood.
13. _____ I have thought that I need to “work through” a traumatic experience in my life.
14. _____ I have thought that I need more close friends.
15. _____ I have thought that there is no one to talk with about highly stressful experiences.
16. _____ I have concluded that I work too hard for my own good.

Items about your clients and their families:

17. _____ I am frightened of things traumatized people and their family have said or done to me.
18. _____ I experience troubling dreams similar to a client of mine and their family.
19. _____ I have experienced intrusive thoughts of sessions with especially difficult clients and their families.
20. _____ I have suddenly and involuntarily recalled a frightening experience while working with a client or their family.
21. _____ I am preoccupied with more than one client and their family.
22. _____ I am losing sleep over a client and their family's traumatic experiences.
23. _____ I have thought that I might have been “infected” by the traumatic stress of my clients and their families.

24. _____ I remind myself to be less concerned about the well-being of my clients and their families.
25. _____ I have felt trapped by my work as a helper.
26. _____ I have felt a sense of hopelessness associated with working with clients and their families.
27. _____ I have felt "on edge" about various things and I attribute this to working with certain clients and their families.
28. _____ I have wished that I could avoid working with some clients and their families.
29. _____ I have been in danger working with some clients and their families.
30. _____ I have felt that some of my clients and their families dislike me personally.

Items about being a helper and your work environment:

31. _____ I have felt weak, tired, and rundown as a result of my work as a helper.
32. _____ I have felt depressed as a result of my work as a helper.
33. _____ I am successful at separating work from personal life.
34. _____ I feel little compassion toward most of my co-workers.
35. _____ I feel I am working more for the money than for personal fulfillment.
36. _____ I find it difficult separating my personal life from my work life.
37. _____ I have a sense of worthlessness/disillusionment/resentment associated with my work.
38. _____ I have thoughts that I am a "failure" as a helper.
39. _____ I have thoughts that I am not succeeding at achieving my life goals.
40. _____ I have to deal with bureaucratic, unimportant tasks in my work life.

SCORING INSTRUCTIONS:

- (a) Be certain that you answered all items.
- (b) Circle the following 23 items: 1-8, 10-13, 17-26 and 29.
- (c) Add the numbers that you wrote next to these 23 items.
- (d) Note your risk of Compassion Fatigue:
- 26 or less= Extremely Low risk
 - 27-30= Low Risk
 - 31-35= Moderate Risk
 - 36-40= High Risk
 - 41 or more= Extremely High Risk

Then, (e) Add the numbers next to the items that are not circled.

- (e) Note your risk of Burnout:
- 19 or less= Extremely Low risk
 - 20-24= Low Risk
 - 25-29= Moderate Risk
 - 30-42= High Risk
 - 43 or more= Extremely High Risk

Areas of Personal and Professional Functioning Impacted by Compassion Fatigue

Cognitive: Lowered concentration, Lowered self-esteem, Apathy, Rigidity, Disorientation, Perfectionism, Preoccupation with trauma, Thoughts of self-harm or harm to others.

Emotional: Powerlessness, Guilt, Anger/rage, Survivor guilt, Numbness, Fear, Helplessness, Sadness, Depression, Mood swings, Depleted energy, Increased sensitivity.

Behavioral: Impatience, Withdrawn, Moody, Regression, Sleep disturbance, Nightmares, Appetite changes, Hypervigilance, Elevated startle response, Accident prone, Easily loses things.

Spiritual: Question the meaning of life, Loss of purpose, Decreased self-appraisal, Pervasive hopelessness, Anger at God, Question religious beliefs, Loss of faith in higher power, Greater degree of skepticism.

Personal Relationships: Withdrawal, Decreased interest in sex/intimacy, Mistrust, Isolation from others, Overprotective as parent/spouse, Projective anger or blame, Intolerance, Loneliness, Increase in interpersonal conflicts.

Physical/Somatic: Shock, Sweating, Rapid breathing, Increased heart rate, Breathing difficulty, Joint and muscle aches, Dizziness, Increase in number and severity of medical concerns, Impaired immune system.

Work Performance: Low morale, Low motivation, Task avoidance, Obsession about details, Dichotomous thinking, Apathy, Negativity, Lack of appreciation, Detachment, Poor work quality and communication, Staff conflicts, Absenteeism, Exhaustion and irritability, Withdrawal from colleagues.

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Internet Resources:

www.ace-network.com

www.apa.org

www.emdria.org

www.giftfromwithin.org

www.greencross.org

[www. Trauma-pages.com](http://www.Trauma-pages.com)